

# Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: English Language Arts & Literacy Stimulus Specifications

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# Smarter Balanced English Language Arts & Literacy Stimulus Specifications

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## Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: English Language Arts & Literacy Stimulus Specifications

### Introduction

The English language arts (ELA) stimulus specifications will help item writers select appropriate topics, features, and formats for their work. These parameters are informed by best practices described in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Content Specifications for ELA*, and the practices prevalent in Smarter Balanced states' guidelines. Appropriate kinds of texts, grade level- appropriate topics and complexity, and other features pertinent to the domain of ELA will be discussed and guidance will be provided. Item writers should follow these guidelines and refer to the *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Content Specifications for ELA* when developing or selecting stimuli, the *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Guidelines for Accessibility and Accommodations*, and the *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Bias and Sensitivity Guidelines*.

Most items/tasks for assessment include a stimulus along with a question to which the student will respond. Stimulus materials are used in ELA assessments to provide context for assessing the knowledge and skills of students. These stimuli are diverse. They can be traditional passages but viewed on a computer screen; videos for students to watch or audio recordings for students to listen to; simulated web pages for students to use for research or scenarios to react to. Item writers need to understand how stimuli used in the Smarter Balanced assessments are similar to and different from stimuli used in traditional assessments. These guidelines will explain these similarities and differences and provide parameters for stimulus use.

Wise use of technology can support the expectation for increasingly complex thinking by providing an array of stimuli in the Smarter Balanced assessment. Item writers will use stimuli to set up questions, to “kick start” thinking, so that students can respond to selected- response and constructed-response items or performance tasks.

The Common Core State Standards for ELA address four strands: reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. One key goal of the Common Core State Standards is for students to be able to read (listen to) increasingly more complex texts and write (deliver) increasingly more complex responses, as they proceed through school with a focus on being college- and career-ready as they exit high school. Stimuli that pose appropriate challenges must be sufficiently complex to elicit responses that demonstrate college- and career-readiness. Students whose work shows college- and career-readiness in ELA will exemplify the vision expressed in the Common Core State Standards. A college- and career-ready person is one

- who reads, understands, and enjoys complex works of literature;

- who reads through extensive amounts of information in print and digitally, both habitually and critically;
- who seeks thoughtful engagement with literature and informational texts to broaden his or her experience and worldview;
- who demonstrates both cogent reasoning and the use of evidence in decision-making in all aspects of life; and
- whose skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking, and language inform all language-based creative and purposeful expression.

The *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Content Specifications for ELA* is a bridge document linking the CCSS to the Smarter Balanced assessment claims and targets. There are four claims for ELA/Literacy, each with a number of targets which provide evidence to support each claim. The four claims are

**Claim #1** – Students can read closely and analytically to comprehend a range of increasingly complex literary and informational texts.

**Claim #2** – Students can produce effective and well-grounded writing for a range of purposes and audiences.

**Claim #3** – Students can employ effective speaking and listening skills for a range of purposes and audiences.

**Claim #4** – Students can engage in research/inquiry to investigate topics, and to analyze, integrate, and present information.

Smarter Balanced ELA Content Specifications emanate from the Common Core State Standards and demand the same rigor, the same complexity, and the same expectation of college- and career-readiness. The Smarter Balanced assessment is different from previous assessments because it is more stringent, expecting students to demonstrate complex abilities in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. Performance tasks will provide opportunities for students to show their knowledge and skills over longer periods and in greater depth.

## Types of Stimuli

### Stimuli Formats

Because many of the claims and targets may be assessed in a variety of ways, the stimulus formats may vary. For Claim 1, the stimuli should be texts, whether literary or informational. For constructed responses in Claim 1, a pair of poems that have a similar theme or format may be presented. Alternatively, there may be a poem and an informational text that have similar or different ideas. Informational texts may be paired to present support or opposition to a thesis. Regardless of the stimulus, the claim must assess the student's ability to read complex texts. The reading passages used for Claim 1 should be on grade level. Constructed responses should usually take five, and no more than ten, minutes to complete. In performance tasks, when reading is joined with writing (Claim 2), speaking and listening (Claim 3), and research (Claim 4), the stimuli should still include texts but may also include other types of stimuli, such as video and audio stimuli. Item writers must consider the length of time in which students can reasonably be expected to complete the entire performance task. See *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Performance Task Guidelines*.

The kinds of stimuli for Claims 2–4 will vary. These stimuli may include works of art, articles from newspapers and magazines, speeches, cartoons, lectures, debates, and other live presentations, which may be videotaped or audio-taped. The use of various kinds of scenarios is also possible and may include simulated Internet or web pages. Articles or editorials expressing opposing points of view or taped debates are suitable for argument writing. For some constructed-response items and for all performance tasks, there should be multiple stimuli. In selecting stimuli for performance tasks, item writers must select recordings that are reasonable for use by the grade level of the students, the number of stimuli selected, and length of time the students have to work on the task. Reading, viewing, and/or listening to stimuli for performance tasks should take no more than one-third of the total time provided to complete the task.

All stimuli must have the following characteristics:

- be clear and of fine quality
- adhere to descriptions and the level of quality set forth in the Common Core State Standards, the *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Content Specifications for ELA*, and this document
- meet the demands of grade-level interest and appropriateness
- have a level of complexity for Claim 1 reading literary and informational passages on a Common Core State Standards grade-band level
- have a level of complexity one year below test grade for Claims 2-4; readability is being controlled this way so that the students can stay focused on the content and skills other than reading that are being measured.
- consider accessibility concerns (See the *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Accessibility and Accommodations Guidelines* and the *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Bias and Sensitivity Guidelines*.)

Additional guidelines for alternative stimuli include the following:

- art should be identified by title, artist, and year completed
- newspaper and magazine articles and cartoons should include titles, authors' and artists' names, source, and publication dates
- lectures and debates should identify the speakers, occasion, location, and date
- simulated Internet or web pages should
  - reflect the styles of actual/authentic Internet pages;
  - be identified as simulated;
  - have names that are different from real Internet sites; and
  - have names that have been checked on the Internet to be sure they do not exist and that no similar ones exist.
- video and audio used to measure speaking and listening should include purpose setting statements which identify the speaker(s), occasion, location (if pertinent), and date
- video and audio clips should
  - be clear and of fine quality;
  - adhere to the descriptions and level of quality demanded of other stimuli;
  - meet the demands of grade-level interest and appropriateness; and
  - have levels of complexity at least one year below test grade; consider accessibility concerns. (See the *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Accessibility and Accommodations Guidelines*.)

In using some kinds of stimuli—informational texts in particular—text features (such as graphics, tables, charts, photographs, and videos) provide additional information to students. Text features must

- be clear and of fine quality;
- relate directly to the text of the stimulus;
- be true to the original if reproduced from another source; and
- add to the complexity and worth of the text as a whole.

### Writing Stimuli for Constructed Response Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT) Items

Writing stimuli are different from other stimuli. Examples of writing stimuli include, but are not limited to, a passage or news article, a video or audio recording of a debate, or other graphic representation such as a cartoon. The prompt should be short—not more than 100 words for a constructed-response item—and accompanied by a rubric that clearly describes the expectation for the student. The prompt should include the following details: purpose/text types (narrative, informative/explanatory, or opinion/argumentative) and audience. The constructed response item should not take more than ten minutes for students to complete. Writing stimuli should follow

guidelines for appropriateness in this document; however, readability and complexity should be one grade level below the assessment level.

## Stimulus Metadata

Each stimulus will have metadata provided so that people examining the assessment can determine whether the stimulus adheres to the specifications and whether the stimulus is grade-level appropriate. Metadata provided with each stimulus includes the following:

- stimulus unique identifying number
- title
- author
- source (copyright information or “commissioned passage”)
- source bibliography (if commissioned)
- fact checked? (yes/no)
- factual problems? (yes/no)
- copyright status (approved, not requested, rejected, pending)
- genre
- topic
- length (number of words in passages, number of minutes if recorded)
- reading level based on Flesch-Kincaid and/or Lexile
- level of complexity based on the State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards
- links to related stimuli
- previous use/possible uses

## ELA/Literacy-Specific Considerations

### Choosing Appropriate Stimulus Materials

Item writers must select well-crafted literary and informational stimulus pieces with topics that appeal to students' interests and that are appropriate for their grade level. While students may have some prior knowledge of topics that appeal to them, care should be taken to choose little-known information about topics of common interest since the goal is not to assess student's prior knowledge. When choosing informational texts of interest to students at a specific grade level, strongly consider finding stimulus pieces that relate to science, social studies, history, or technology as prescribed in the Common Core State Standards. The following is a list of possible topics that may be appropriate for various grade levels; however, it is not meant to constrain or limit other topic considerations: Topics appropriate for elementary students might include animals, famous people and events in history, robots, and astronomy. These same topics may be appropriate for middle school students, but the topics should be addressed with greater complexity. High school students' interests vary but may include the previous topics as well as careers, philosophy, the Constitution, and current events. *Interest level, as important as it is, is second to the level of complexity and value set by the Common Core State Standards and the Smarter Balanced vision for students to graduate from high school with skills and knowledge that demonstrate college- and career-readiness.*

Stimuli also need to bridge the gap of gender interest, or at least provide a balance between those of interest to or about males and those of interest to or about females. This balance should be considered from the beginning of the development cycle and then later checked and re-balanced during the test- construction cycle. In addition, item writers should become familiar with topics that are excluded from Smarter Balanced assessments and avoid stimuli that relate to them. These topics are included in the *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Bias and Sensitivity Guidelines*.

### Purpose-Setting Statements

For much of the Smarter Balanced assessments, stimuli will be excerpts from longer works. Both complete and excerpted passages need introductions. Media introductions may be appended to the video or audio. Each introduction should provide only necessary information for the student to understand the stimulus and be able to respond to the items/tasks. Extraneous information should be omitted. The full title of the original passage and author should be included with the text.

## Literary Texts and Informational Texts

Texts for Claim 1 of the *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Content Specifications for ELA* are divided into two parts: literary texts and informational texts. These texts are listed in the Common Core State Standards on pages 31 and 57. A more detailed list of text types which reflects the Common Core State Standards classifications appears in the chart below:

Literary Texts			Informational Texts			
Text Types	Grades 3–5	Grades 6–12	Text Types	Grades 3–5	Grades 6–12	
<b>Stories</b>	Includes children’s adventure stories, folktales, legends, fables, fantasy, realistic fiction, and myth	Includes the subgenres of adventure stories, historical fiction, mysteries, myths, science fiction, realistic fiction, allegories, parodies, satire, and graphic novels	<b>Literary Nonfiction and Historical, Scientific, and Technical Texts</b>	Includes biographies and autobiographies; books about history, social studies, science, and the arts; technical texts, including directions, forms, and information displayed in graphs, charts, or maps; and digital sources on a range of topics	Includes the subgenres of exposition, argument, and functional text in the form of personal essays, speeches, opinion pieces, essays about art or literature, biographies, memoirs, journalism, and historical, scientific, technical, or economic accounts (including digital sources) written for a broad audience	
	<b>Dramas</b>	Includes staged dialogue and brief familiar scenes				Includes one-act and multi-act plays, both in written form and on film
	<b>Poetry</b>	Includes nursery rhymes and the subgenres of the narrative poem, limerick, and free-verse poem				Includes the subgenres of narrative poems, lyrical poems, free-verse poems, sonnets, odes, ballads, and epics

Literary texts include stories, drama, and poetry; informational texts include literary nonfiction and a broad range of texts and topics. Literary nonfiction texts convey factual information that may or may not employ a narrative structure or personal perspective. Smarter Balanced considers literary nonfiction as informational texts; however, expert judgment must be used to evaluate each text. In some cases, a literary nonfiction text will more rightfully belong with literary text if it contains the story structure of a fictional work and/or employs literary devices.

## Passage Lengths

Passage length specifications must be considered in any assessment. Because students have a limited amount of time to complete an assessment, expecting them to read and comprehend lengthy texts is unrealistic. The following table presents maximum word counts for texts to be used in Smarter Balanced items/tasks:

GRADE	MAXIMUM WORD COUNT
3	650
4	750
5	750
6	950
7	950
8	950
High School (9–11)	1100

Few passages meet the exact number of words in a chart. It is important to note that the maximum word counts are suitable for assessment situations, but not meant to be absolute.

## Measures to Determine Text Complexity

The Common Core State Standards require students to read increasingly complex texts with greater independence and proficiency as they progress toward career and college readiness. The *Common Core State Standards Appendix A: Research Supporting Key Elements of the Standards* defines a three-part model for measuring text complexity: (1) quantitative evaluation of the text, (2) qualitative evaluation of the text, and (3) matching reader to text and task. For the purposes of this document, emphasis will be on the first two parts in this model.

### Quantitative Measures

The traditional quantitative measures of text complexity, such as readability metrics and word count, should be used to identify appropriate text. However, the readability indices work best with continuous print-based texts. The time available for student reading or viewing during an assessment period limits the time any stimulus may take for the student to read and understand. Therefore, most of the stimuli will be relatively short, as indicated on the previous page, excluding some performance task stimuli. See the *Smarter Balanced ELA Item Specifications*.

Several readability indices are available, and each has its own advantages and disadvantages. The most readily available is the Flesch-Kincaid index, because it is the metric used in Microsoft Word and other computer word-processing programs. It provides counts of a number of passage attributes and the average numbers of sentences per paragraph, words per sentence, and characters per word. It also provides readability data: the number of passive sentences, the Flesch Reading Ease score and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level for the passage. The latter is calculated using the number of syllables in the passage. Advantages of this index are that it is readily available, it is intended for texts suitable for grades three through adult, and it gives a quick estimate of the complexity level of a passage. One notable drawback to this formula is that it may underestimate the readability levels of informational passages because it does not account for specialized vocabulary. No other readability metrics are as readily available, as wide-ranging in their capacity to cross several grade levels, and as convenient as Flesch-Kincaid.

Lexiles are used to offer readabilities for whole texts from which shorter passages may be taken. Lexiles may be used as one part of the evidence to determine whether a passage is viable for the Smarter Balanced assessments. Lexiles levels for Common Core State Standards grade bands (Appendix B) are shown in the following chart. These “new” Lexiles meet the levels of complexity needed to meet the Common Core State Standards and Smarter Balanced guidelines for career- and college-readiness.

Grade	New Lexile Ranges
3	450–790
4–5	770–980
6–8	950–1155
9–10	1080–1305
11	1215–1355

Regardless of the readability estimate used, passage writers or finders should select texts that cover a range of difficulty. Item writers must use good judgment and a qualitative measure in selecting stimuli that are challenging and complex but still appropriate.

### Qualitative Measures

Qualitative measures of text complexity have been described by the *Common Core State Standards Appendix A: Research Supporting Key Elements of the Standards* as “best measured or only measurable by an attentive human reader, such as levels of meaning or purpose; structure; language conventionality and clarity; and knowledge demands.”

Smarter Balanced readabilities for Claim 1 reading literary and informational passages are expected to be on a Common Core State Standards grade-band level for all Claim 1 items. However, complex narrative fiction can pose a challenge for all readability indices. One notable example is John Steinbeck’s novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. Because Steinbeck uses more simple words to express complex ideas, both Flesch-Kincaid and Lexiles have rated it appropriate for grades 2–3. Although younger students may be able to read the words, they will not truly understand the complex ideas in the text.

In addition it is not possible to produce an accurate readability estimate for some types of passages (e.g. poems or passages with a great deal of dialogue), and because no readability formula is perfect, qualitative measures and teacher content review committees should provide expert opinions on grade-level appropriateness for passages for the Smarter Balanced assessments.

Two rubrics appended to this document on pages 15-18 provide the qualitative measures for literary and informational text complexity. These rubrics are followed by two sample texts that appear in the *Common Core State Standards Appendix B: Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Task* and text complexity analysis worksheets for these sample texts. As indicated on these worksheets, the quantitative measures suggest the appropriate grade band of the text while the qualitative rubrics pinpoint the specific grade level. These rubrics give us a powerful and comprehensive way of evaluating a range of stimulus materials that cover the literary and informational scope outlined in the Common Core State Standards.



# Smarter Balanced English Language Arts & Literacy Stimulus Specifications

Texts selected for the Smarter Balanced Assessment should have evidence of their complexity determination and grade-level placement, based on both quantitative and qualitative measures as specified above.

## Conclusion

The Smarter Balanced assessments that will be developed to measure student achievement in relation to the Common Core State Standards are ambitious and innovative in scope. They emphasize the creation of a new style of assessment that engages and challenges students. With this imperative in mind, it is important to emphasize that these specifications for stimulus materials are designed to foster the level of creativity and innovative assessment that the Smarter Balanced states have envisioned.



# Smarter Balanced English Language Arts & Literacy Stimulus Specifications

## APPENDIX A: Text Complexity: Qualitative Measures Rubrics—Literary and Informational Text

The ELA State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS) developed the following qualitative measures rubrics for literary texts and informational texts. The rubrics examine the following criteria judged as central to students' successful comprehension of text: meaning, text structure, language features, and knowledge demands. Each of these categories is ranked based on descriptors associated with the following levels: slightly complex, moderately complex, very complex, and exceedingly complex.

Text Complexity: Qualitative Measures Rubric

LITERARY TEXTS

Features	Exceedingly Complex	Very Complex	Moderately Complex	Slightly Complex
<b>Meaning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Meaning:</b> Several levels and competing elements of meaning that are difficult to identify, separate, and interpret; theme is implicit or subtle, often ambiguous and revealed over the entirety of the text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Meaning:</b> Several levels of meaning that may be difficult to identify or separate; theme is implicit or subtle and may be revealed over the entirety of the text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Meaning:</b> More than one level of meaning with levels clearly distinguished from each other; theme is clear but may be conveyed with some subtlety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Meaning:</b> One level of meaning; theme is obvious and revealed early in the text.</li> </ul>
<b>Text Structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Organization:</b> Organization is intricate with regard to elements such as narrative viewpoint, time shifts, multiple characters, storylines, and detail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Organization:</b> Organization may include subplots, time shifts, and more complex characters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Organization:</b> Organization may have two or more storylines and is occasionally difficult to predict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Organization:</b> Organization of text is clear, chronological, or easy to predict</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Use of Graphics:</b> If used, minimal illustrations that support the text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Use of Graphics:</b> If used, a few illustrations that support the text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Use of Graphics:</b> If used, a range of illustrations that support selected parts of the text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Use of Graphics:</b> If used, extensive illustrations that directly support and assist in interpreting the written text</li> </ul>

Features	Exceedingly Complex	Very Complex	Moderately Complex	Slightly Complex
<b>Language Features</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Conventionality:</b> Dense and complex; contains abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Conventionality:</b> Complex; contains some abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Conventionality:</b> Largely explicit and easy to understand, with some occasions for more complex meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Conventionality:</b> Explicit, literal, straightforward, easy to understand</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Vocabulary:</b> Generally unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic language; may be ambiguous or purposefully misleading</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Vocabulary:</b> Somewhat complex language that is sometimes unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Vocabulary:</b> Mostly contemporary, familiar, conversational; rarely unfamiliar or overly academic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Vocabulary:</b> Contemporary, familiar, conversational language</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Sentence Structure:</b> Mainly complex sentences, often containing multiple concepts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Sentence Structure:</b> Many complex sentences with several subordinate phrases or clauses and transition words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Sentence Structure:</b> Simple and compound sentences, with some more complex constructions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Sentence Structure:</b> Mainly simple sentences</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledge Demands</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Life Experiences:</b> Explores complex, sophisticated themes; experiences are distinctly different from the common reader</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Life Experiences:</b> Explores themes of varying levels of complexity; experiences portrayed are uncommon to most readers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Life Experiences:</b> Explores a single theme; experiences portrayed are common to many readers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Life Experiences:</b> Explores a single theme; experiences portrayed are everyday and common to most readers</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge:</b> Many references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge:</b> Some references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge:</b> A few references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge:</b> No references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements</li> </ul>

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## Text Complexity: Qualitative Measures Rubric

### INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

Features	Exceedingly Complex	Very Complex	Moderately Complex	Slightly Complex
<b>Purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Purpose:</b> Subtle, implied, difficult to determine; intricate, theoretical elements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Purpose:</b> Implied, but fairly easy to infer; more theoretical than concrete</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Purpose:</b> Implied, but easy to identify based upon context or source</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Purpose:</b> Explicitly stated; clear, concrete with a narrow focus</li> </ul>
<b>Text Structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Organization of Main Ideas:</b> Connections between an extensive range of ideas or events are deep, intricate, and often implicit or subtle; organization of the text is intricate or specialized for a particular discipline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Organization of Main Ideas:</b> Connections between an expanded range ideas, processes or events are deeper and often implicit or subtle; organization may contain multiple pathways and may exhibit traits common to a specific discipline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Organization of Main Ideas:</b> Connections between some ideas or events are implicit or subtle; organization is evident and generally sequential</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Organization of Main Ideas:</b> Connections between ideas, processes or events are explicit and clear; organization of text is clear or chronological or easy to predict</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Text Features:</b> If used, are essential in understanding content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Text Features:</b> If used, greatly enhance the reader's understanding of content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Text Features:</b> If used, enhance the reader's understanding of content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Text Features:</b> If used, help the reader navigate and understand content but are not essential</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Use of Graphics:</b> If used, extensive, intricate, essential integrated graphics, tables, charts, etc., necessary to make meaning of text; also may provide information not otherwise conveyed in the text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Use of Graphics:</b> If used, essential integrated graphics, tables, charts, etc.; may occasionally be essential to understanding the text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Use of Graphics:</b> If used, graphics mostly supplementary to understanding of the text, such as indexes, glossaries; graphs, pictures, tables, and charts directly support the text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Use of Graphics:</b> If used, simple graphics, unnecessary to understanding the text but directly support and assist in interpreting the written text</li> </ul>

Features	Exceedingly Complex	Very Complex	Moderately Complex	Slightly Complex
<b>Language Features</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Conventionality:</b> Dense and complex; contains abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Conventionality:</b> Complex; contains some abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Conventionality:</b> Largely explicit and easy to understand with some occasions for more complex meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Conventionality:</b> Explicit, literal, straightforward, easy to understand</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Vocabulary:</b> Generally unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic language; may be ambiguous or purposefully misleading</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Vocabulary:</b> Somewhat complex language that is sometimes unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Vocabulary:</b> Mostly contemporary, familiar, conversational; rarely unfamiliar or overly academic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Vocabulary:</b> Contemporary, familiar, conversational language</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Sentence Structure:</b> Mainly complex sentences, often containing multiple concepts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Sentence Structure:</b> Many complex sentences with several subordinate phrases or clauses and transition words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Sentence Structure:</b> Simple and compound sentences, with some more complex constructions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Sentence Structure:</b> Mainly simple sentences</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledge Demands</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Subject Matter Knowledge:</b> Extensive, perhaps specialized or even theoretical discipline-specific content knowledge; range of challenging abstract and theoretical concepts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Subject Matter Knowledge:</b> Moderate levels of discipline-specific content knowledge; some theoretical knowledge may enhance understanding; range of recognizable ideas and challenging abstract concepts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Subject Matter Knowledge:</b> Everyday practical knowledge and some discipline-specific content knowledge; both simple and more complicated, abstract ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Subject Matter Knowledge:</b> Everyday, practical knowledge; simple, concrete ideas</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Intertextuality:</b> Many references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Intertextuality:</b> Some references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Intertextuality:</b> A few references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Intertextuality:</b> No references or allusions to other texts, or outside ideas, theories, etc.</li> </ul>

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## Appendix B: Sample Annotated Text and Worksheet: Text Complexity Analysis

### Sample Text Grade 5

**Sample Annotated Text:** *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, by Grace Lin

New York: Little, Brown, 2009. (2009)

**Sample Worksheets:** Literary Text Complexity Analysis of *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* by Grace Lin

### Sample Text Grade 9

**Sample Annotated Text:** *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* by Frederick Douglass, Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845

**Sample Worksheet:** Informational Text Complexity Analysis of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* by Frederick Douglass

Two sample texts have been evaluated based on both quantitative and qualitative measures as illustrated on the following pages. Each sample annotated text is followed by a text analysis worksheet which uses the quantitative measures to suggest the appropriate grade band of the text and the qualitative rubrics to pinpoint the specific grade level.

Sample annotated text: Lexile: 1030; Flesch-Kincaid: 7.6; word count 283

*Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, by Grace Lin. (Common Core State Standards, Appendix B, p. 66)

From Chapter 1

Far away from here, following the Jade River,

There was once a black mountain that cut into the sky like a jagged piece of rough metal. The villagers called it Fruitless Mountain because nothing grew on it and birds and animals did not rest there.

Crowded in the corner of where Fruitless Mountain and the Jade River met was a village that was a shade of faded brown. This was because the land around the village was hard and poor. To coax rice out of the stubborn land, the field had to be flooded with water. The villagers had to tramp in the mud, bending and stooping and planting day after day. Working in the mud so much made it spread everywhere and the hot sun dried it onto their clothes and hair and homes. Over time, everything in the village had become the dull color of dried mud.

One of the houses in this village was so small that its wood boards, held together by the roof, made one think of a bunch of matches tied with a piece of twine. Inside, there was barely enough room for three people to sit around the table—which was lucky because only three people lived there. One of them was a young girl called Minli.

Minli was not brown and dull like the rest of the village. She had ~~glossy black~~ hair with pink cheeks, shining eyes always eager for adventure, and a fast smile that flashed from her face. When people saw her lively and impulsive spirit, they thought her name, which meant quick thinking, suited her well. “Too well,” her mother sighed, as Minli had a habit of quick acting as well.

### Knowledge Demands

The setting in China and the references to rice planting may be unfamiliar.

### Language Features

The language is mostly basic with a few challenging words, such as “coax” and “impulsive,” and some figurative language.

The sentences are lengthy with embedded clauses.

### Text Structure and Meaning

The narrative is in a clear chronological order.

The meaning is implied, but it can be inferred from the description of the dull countryside at the beginning of this excerpt which is sharply contrasted to the bright description of the main character in the last paragraph.

Worksheet: Text Complexity Analysis		
Title	Author	Text Description
Where the Mountain Meets the Moon	Lin Grace	Literary text excerpt set in a village in China (283 word count)



**Recommended Placement for Assessment: Grade 5**

The quantitative Lexile and Flesch-Kincaid measures suggest an appropriate placement at the upper grades 4–5 band or early grades 6–8 band. The Common Core State Standards Appendix B (page 66) places this text in the grades 4-5 band level. The qualitative review supports grade 5. **Based on these sets of measures, this passage is recommended for assessment at grade 5.**

Qualitative Measures	Quantitative Measures
<p><b>Meaning/Purpose:</b>  <u>Moderately complex:</u> The purpose is implied, but can be inferred from the bleak descriptions of the village and the contrast with Minli.</p> <p><b>Text Structure:</b>  <u>Slightly complex:</u> The narrative is chronological with no text features or graphics.</p> <p><b>Language Features:</b>  <u>Slightly complex:</u> The vocabulary is mostly basic with only a couple of challenging words (coax, impulsive) and some figurative language.  <u>Moderately complex:</u> Sentences are lengthy, with embedded clauses.</p> <p><b>Knowledge Demands:</b>  <u>Moderately complex:</u> Life experience in the passage may be common, but the setting in China and references to rice planting may be unfamiliar.</p>	<p><b>Common Core State Standards Appendix A Complexity Band Level</b> (if applicable):            Grades 4–5</p> <p><b>Lexile or Other Quantitative Measure of the Text:</b>            Lexile: 990; upper grades 4-5 or early grades 6-8            Flesch-Kincaid: 5.8</p> <div style="background-color: #4682B4; color: white; text-align: center; padding: 2px;"><b>Considerations for Passage Selection</b></div> <p>Passage selection should be based on the ELA Content Specifications targets and the cognitive demands of the assessment tasks.</p> <p><b>Potential Challenges a Text May Pose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accessibility</li> <li>Sentence and text structures</li> <li>Archaic language, slang, idioms, or other language challenges</li> <li>Background knowledge</li> <li>Bias and sensitivity issues</li> <li>Word count</li> </ul>

Adapted from the 2012 ELA SCASS work

Sample annotated text: Lexile: 1030; Flesch-Kincaid: 7.6; word count 944

*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, by Frederick Douglass.

(Common Core State Standards, Appendix B, p. 71)

The plan which I adopted, and the one by which I was most successful, was that of making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers. With their kindly aid, obtained at different times and in different places, I finally succeeded in learning to read. When I was sent on errands, I always took my book with me, and by going one part of my errand quickly, I found time to get a lesson before my return. I used also to carry bread with me, enough of which was always in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for I was much better off in this regard than many of the poor white children in our neighborhood. This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge. I am strongly tempted to give the names of two or three of those little boys, as a testimonial of the gratitude and affection I bear them; but prudence forbids;—not that it would injure me, but it might embarrass them; for it is almost an unpardonable offence to teach slaves to read in this Christian country. It is enough to say of the dear little fellows, that they lived on Philpot Street, very near Durgin and Bailey’s ship-yard. I used to talk this matter of slavery over with them. I would sometimes say to them, I wished I could be as free as they would be when they got to be men. “You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, but I am a slave for life! Have not I as good a right to be free as you have?” These words used to be trouble them; they would express for me the liveliest sympathy, and console me with the hope that something would occur by which I might be free.

I was now about twelve years old, and the thought of being a slave for life began to bear heavily upon my heart. Just about this time, I got hold of a book entitled “The Columbian Orator.” Every opportunity I got, I used to read this book. Among much of other interesting matter, I found in it a dialogue between a master and his slave. The slave was represented as having run away from his master three times. The dialogue represented the conversation which took place between them, when the slave was retaken the third time. In this dialogue, the whole argument in behalf of slavery was brought forward by the master, all of which was disposed of by the slave. The slave was made to say some very smart as well as impressive things in reply to his master -- things which had the desired though unexpected effect; for the conversation resulted in the voluntary emancipation of the slave on the part of the master.

#### Language conventionality and clarity

Both long and short sentences with embedded clauses; wording is more formal than conversational.

Rich vocabulary: “testimonial,” “bestow,” “prudence,” “disposed,” “orator,” “emancipation.”

“Bread” used as an analogy.

#### Knowledge demands

Need understanding of time period of 1845 and what was happening in the U.S.

Perspective is first-person, narrated by a former slave.

Reference to “The Columbian Orator,” a 19th c. schoolbook written to “improve youth ... in the useful art of eloquence.

#### Structure and Levels of Meaning

P. 1 is a chronological account of how Douglass learned to read.

P. 2 relates a growing awareness of the burden of slavery through the reading Douglass did at a young age.

In the same book, I met with one of Sheridan’s mighty speeches on and in behalf of Catholic emancipation. These were choice documents to me. I read them over and over again with unabated interest. They gave tongue to interesting thoughts of my own soul, which had frequently flashed though my mind, and died away for want of utterance. The moral which I gained from the dialogue was the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder. What I got from Sheridan was a bold denunciation of slavery, and a powerful vindication of human rights. The reading of these documents enabled me to utter my thoughts, and to meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery; but while they relieved me of one difficulty, they brought on another even more painful than the one of which I was relieved. The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers. I could regard them in no other light than a band of successful robbers, who had left their homes, and gone to Africa, and stolen us from our homes, and in a strange land reduced us to slavery. I loathed them as being the meanest as well as the most wicked of men. As I read and contemplated the subject, behold! That very discontentment which Master Hugh had predicted would follow my learning to read had already come, to torment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish. As I writhed under it, I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow-slaves for their stupidity. I have often wished myself a beast. I preferred the condition of the meanest reptile to my own. Anything, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me. There was no getting rid of it. It was pressed upon me by every object within sight or hearing, animate or inanimate. The silver trump of freedom had roused my soul to eternal wakefulness. Freedom now appeared, to disappear no more forever. It was heard in every sound, and seen in everything. It was ever present to torment me with a sense of my wretched condition. I saw nothing without seeing it, I heard nothing without hearing it, and felt nothing without feeling it. It looked from every star, it smiled in every calm, breathed in every wind, and moved in every storm.

**Knowledge demands**  
Reference to (Lewis) Sheridan, who was an abolitionist

**Language Tier 2 words:**

choice	master
tongue	meanest

**Language:**

denunciation	abhor
vindication	loathe
discontentment	
unutterable	detest

**Levels of Meaning:**  
Douglass shifts from an account of learning to read, to the knowledge that reading brought him, to reflecting on how the awareness of his situation tormented him with injustice.

Worksheet: Text Complexity Analysis		
Title	Author	Text Description
The Life of Frederick Douglass	Frederick Douglass	Informational literary nonfiction text excerpt from the classic autobiography (944 word count)



**Recommended Placement for Assessment: Grade 9**

The quantitative Lexile and Flesch-Kincaid measures suggest an appropriate placement between grades 6-8. The Common Core State Standards Appendix B (page 71) places this text in the grades 6-8 band level. The qualitative review, however, identifies this text as very complex. **Based on these sets of measures, this passage is recommended for assessment at grade 9.**

Qualitative Measures	Quantitative Measures
<p><b>Meaning/Purpose:</b>  <u>Very complex:</u> The purpose is implied, but can be inferred from the title and from very early on in the passage.</p> <p><b>Text Structure:</b>  <u>Very complex:</u> The narrative shifts between historical account and his reflections on the lessons of his early life, as well as how it later affected him. The perspective is first-person, told by a former slave.</p> <p><b>Language Features:</b>  <u>Very complex:</u> Includes both concrete and abstract or figurative language. The language overall is formal and will sometimes be unfamiliar. There are instances of more challenging vocabulary (testimonial, bestow, prudence, disposed, orator, emancipation). Sentences are both short and long with embedded clauses.</p> <p><b>Knowledge Demands:</b>  <u>Very complex:</u> Some references with which students may not be familiar (Lewis Sheridan, the Columbian Orator). Students with knowledge of the time period and US history of slavery will find the text more accessible than those without it.</p>	<p><b>Common Core State Standards Appendix A Complexity Band Level</b> (if applicable):            Grades 6-8</p> <p><b>Lexile or Other Quantitative Measure of the Text:</b>            Lexile: 1030; grades 6-8            Flesch-Kincaid: 7.6</p>
<b>Considerations for Passage Selection</b>	
<p>Passage selection should be based on the ELA Content Specifications targets and the cognitive demands of the assessment tasks.</p> <p><b>Potential Challenges a Text May Pose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessibility</li> <li>• Sentence and text structures</li> <li>• Archaic language, slang, idioms, or other language challenges</li> <li>• Background knowledge</li> <li>• Bias and sensitivity issues</li> <li>• Word count</li> </ul>	

Adapted from the 2012 ELA SCASS work